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SUBJECT: ENGAGEMENT ON UK WOMEN'S ISSUES

REF: STATE 124579

11. (U) Summary: The government is active in promoting women's rights and there is a robust set of non-governmental organizations working on women's issues. Post consults with women's groups on a regular basis on a range of issues including violence against women, Muslim women's issues, and sex trafficking. In 2009, we brought together activists combating violence against women and produced a video highlighting their work. Post also has sponsored visits by British Muslim women to the US and by American Muslim women to the UK to help women learn from each others' experiences in the two countries. End Summary.

Strong Governmental/Non-Governmental Women's Rights Sectors

12. (U) The UK has a well-developed set of governmental and non-governmental institutions for addressing women's issues. There is a cabinet-level Minister for Women and Equality, who heads the Government Equalities Office (GEO), which was established in 2007. The GEO is responsible for ensuring that women receive equal treatment in public services, promoting women's equality in private and public sector labor markets, combating violence against women, and for shepherding the Equalities Bill through Parliament. The Equalities Bill will attempt to unify various bills that prohibit discrimination as well as to impose responsibilities on public bodies to promote equality and eliminate the gender pay gap.

13. (U) The UK's Department for International Development (DFID) has made maternal health and education of girls among its top development priorities, especially in conflict-ridden and fragile states. The Embassy is engaging with the UK government to ensure U.S. and UK assistance strategies are complementary.

14. (U) The non-governmental sector is also robust. There are hundreds of non-governmental organizations working on a wide range of women's issues. These groups work in a variety of ways, from providing shelters and rape counseling to public policy advocacy. One of the most important institutions is the Women's National Commission (WNC). The WNC is a politically independent, government-funded body that acts as an umbrella organization for over 550 smaller groups. It helps women's groups coordinate their efforts and represent their interests to the government.

Post Activities: Combating Violence Against Women

15. (U) Post meets regularly with human rights organizations and women's activists to keep current with women's issues in the UK. We attended a day-long conference on trafficking in persons led by the Serious Organized Crime Agency, the Metropolitan Police, and celebrity anti-trafficking activist Emma Thompson. The DCM recently convened a meeting that brought together representatives of nine women's

organizations who work to prevent violence against women. After the meeting, we interviewed the participants and created a Youtube video highlighting their work. The participants said they appreciated the high-level USG interest and hoped that it could lead to connections with American organizations working on women's issues.

Post Activities: Outreach to Muslim Women

¶6. (U) The Embassy regularly includes Muslim women as part of its overall Muslim outreach programs. In May 2009 the Embassy funded a group of nine Muslim women from Bradford, a Northern English city with a large Muslim population, to visit San Diego, New York, and Washington, DC. They met with American NGOs and community activists to compare how women, and especially Muslim women, address community and women's issues in the UK and the U.S. Participants commented that the U.S. was much more open to and accepting of Muslims than they had imagined, and they were impressed with the spirit of volunteerism in the U.S. The Embassy will send another group of Muslim women to go on a similar program in the spring of ¶2010. The Embassy provided grants to bring the authors of the book "Living Islam Out Loud: American Muslim Women Speak Out" to the UK on two different occasions over the past two years. The authors shared and compared their experiences in speaking engagements with a variety of different audiences.

Suggestion for Future Activities

¶7. (U) A number of women's rights activists have told Embosffs that they would like to increase their interactions with U.S. counterparts in order to learn from each other's experiences. One of the most important contributions the Embassy can make is to facilitate these connections. Post has made an effort to put the WNC in touch with the White House Council on Women and Girls, since the 30-year-old WNC has considerable institutional knowledge that could be useful to the White House Council. Post will try to find other opportunities to match up UK and U.S. organizations and would value the Department's aid in identifying U.S. partners to work with women's groups abroad.

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